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The Genealogy of the Pallavas: From Brahmins to Kings

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ABSTRACT: In their epigraphical genealogies the Pallavas of South India (fourth to ninth centuries CE) claim to belong to a brahmin lineage that gradually embraced the duty of kings. As such, these genealogies present a definition of kingship that differs from its Brahmanical conceptualization. I show how the Pallavas accounted in their 'mythical genealogies' for their royal occupation through a transformation in two steps: from pure brahmins to brahmin-warriors, and from brahmin-warriors to kings. I explain how the birth of the eponymous hero Pallava, from Aśvatthāman and a mother who has a strong link with royalty, marks the shift towards kingship. I describe how this royal status of the dynasty is confirmed by the integration of royal figures from other dynasties into the 'pseudo-historical genealogies' that link the eponym to the historical kings. I then explore the mythical patrimony of the Pallavas, discussing how we might understand in a broader context the ideological purport of this royal claim to both brahmin and *kṣatriya* descent.

KEYWORDS: epigraphy; ideology; kingship; Pallavas; South India.

In their inscriptions the Pallavas, who ruled for approximately six hundred years between the fourth and the ninth centuries CE in South India, expressed a royal discourse differing from the Brahmanical conceptualization of kingship.[2] Besides their role in *praśastis*, genealogies were an important tool for royal ideology. In this paper I intend to show how the Pallavas accounted in their epigraphical records for the fact that, although of brahmin descent, they were also kings, and to discuss how we might understand the ideological purport of such a statement.

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2. On the history and the royal discourse of the Pallavas, see Francis 2009; Francis forthcoming b.

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The Pallava epigraphical corpus amounts to approximately five hundred inscriptions. Among these, nearly one hundred can be considered as royal, that is, issued by Pallava kings. Among these, 34 (29 copper-plate and five stone inscriptions) contain genealogies of the dynasty.[3]

From 300 to 550 CE, most of the available Pallava inscriptions are copper-plate charters composed in prose.[4] They were written first in Prakrit, sometimes with minor portions in Sanskrit, and then, from approximately 350 onwards, entirely in Sanskrit. The five available Prakrit records contain no real genealogy: some close relatives of the donor are sometimes mentioned, while the only recurrent information of genealogical purport is that the Pallavas belong to the Bhāradvāja *gotra*. Real genealogies, usually of four generations,[5] start to appear systematically with the Sanskrit copper plates, as the donor's descent up to his great-grandfather is provided. This type of genealogy may be considered, at face value, to be historical.

Around 550, a new type of copper plate was invented that would become usual for the next centuries, except for a few monolingual Sanskrit copper plates of the older type. From this point onwards, a Sanskrit panegyrical and genealogical portion, either partly or entirely in verse, is followed by a business part in Tamil recording the practical details of the gift. A major innovation is the fact that the genealogy is no longer restricted to the immediate historical ancestors of the donor, but goes back to the god Brahmā who arises from Viṣṇu's navel at the time of the secondary creation of the world (*pratisarga*). The historical portions of the genealogies—which do not display a fixed number of four generations as in the monolingual Sanskrit charters—are thus preceded by a Purāṇa-style genealogy,[6] which is usually made of two segments: one mythical, and one pseudo-historical.

The first genealogical segment starts with Brahmā and ends with the eponymous ancestor Pallava. From its earliest attestation, this segment shows a largely fixed, canonical pedigree. From a western point of view we deal here with myth; hence I call this segment the mythical genealogy. In most inscriptions it is followed by another segment that connects it to the historical genealogy and concerns the kings who lived after the eponym Pallava, but before the first king of the historical genealogy whose genealogical link to the donor is mentioned. Usually these kings are just named as a group, and the genealogical connection between them is not specified. Among them we find names occurring in genealogies of the earlier Pallava Sanskrit charters, but also names that belong to other dynasties. This mixing of the memory of

3. For a presentation of Pallava inscriptions see Francis 2009: 46–59; Francis forthcoming a, forthcoming b.
4. The only stone inscription dated to this period is *IP* 1, from Mañchikallu. Between 300 and 550, the only verse portions are the customary verses about the gift.
5. Three generations only are mentioned in *IP* 8.
6. On the categorization of the royal genealogies found in epigraphic and Purāṇic texts, see Ramesh 1984: xxx–xxxii; Thapar 1984: 785–88; Brocquet 1997: 96.

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actual Pallava names and imaginary relationships with other dynasties leads me to call this segment the pseudo-historical genealogy.

This fully fledged new type of genealogy (mythical, pseudo-historical and historical) occurs for the first time in the Paḷḷaṉ Kōyil copper plates (*IP* 17), dated to *c.* 550 from their content, although the plates we possess may be a later copy (Mahadevan 2003: 214 n. 3; Lockwood 2004: 161). As far as I know, this is the earliest Indian epigraphical record with such an elaborate Purāṇa-style genealogy stretching from creation up to the donor. Previously, the Indian epigraphical record comprised only historical genealogies or mentions of *gotra*.

The epigraphic genealogies—mostly found in copper-plate charters, which record royal gifts—were meant to fulfil different needs. First, from a legal point of view, charters are titles of ownership, which are placed in the hands of the donees. The *smṛti*s prescribe the naming of the donor's ancestors (Kane 1974: 860–61), presumably because his identification through his lineage validates the gift. A second function is panegyric. Through the eulogistic description of his ancestors the donor is integrated into a prestigious lineage whose collective aura reflects on him.

A third aspect, closely connected to the previous one, is the legitimation of the donor and his dynasty, since birth establishes status. Kings declare they are *kṣatriya*s and, as such, qualified to rule, in accordance with the śāstric norm. Kings of humble ancestry may even create fictitious genealogies to accommodate themselves to this *kṣatriya* status. The past is thus recreated. A genealogy does not aim so much at producing the authentic lineage of the donor as at providing him with purity of lineage in order to legitimate his rule *de jure*.[7]

I will focus on the Purāṇa-style genealogy of the Pallavas because it implies and involves a royal discourse on kingship that differs from the Brahmanical conceptualization according to which kings must be *kṣatriya*s subordinated to brahmins, and especially to *purohita*s. In their royal discourse, as I will show, the Pallavas present themselves as brahmins who became kings in three steps. First, the mythical genealogy establishes the pure brahmin descent of the Pallavas up to the eponym. Second, the eponym is the locus where kingship is fused, via his maternal line, into the brahmin paternal line. Third, the pseudo-historical genealogy emphasizes the kingly character of the Pallavas, notably by incorporating royal figures from other dynasties.

7. Pollock (2006: 516–24) criticizes 'legitimation theory', advancing against it an 'aesthetic' theory. In my view there is legitimation, at least of a symbolic kind, in royal records that are effectively participants in an ideological and aestheticized contest and constitute part of a royal discourse aimed at brahmins and rival kings.

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MYTHICAL GENEALOGY

Sixteen royal Pallava inscriptions from 550 to 900 provide mythical genealogies,[8] while a sculpted mythical genealogy is found in the Vaikuṇṭhaperumāḷ temple in Kāñcīpuram (second half of the eighth century). Examination of these reveals a recurrent sequence, of seven ancestors before the eponym, which is almost unique to the Pallavas.[9] This is what I call the canonical mythical genealogy (see Table 1). Some variants—by omission, replacement, or inversion of ancestors—exist, but I cannot deal with them here in detail.

Table 1. Mythical genealogy of the Pallavas.

Canonical*	***IP* 46**	***IP* 68**	***IP* 76**	***IP* 81**	***IP* 257**	***IP* 270**
(Viṣṇu)			Avyakta		Viṣṇu	
Brahmā	Brahmā	Brahmā	Brahmā		Brahmā	Brahmā
Aṅgiras	Aṅgiras	Aṅgiras	Aṅgiras		Aṅgiras	Bharadvāja
Bṛhaspati	Bṛhaspati	Bṛhaspati	Bṛhaspati		Bṛhaspati	Aṅgiras
Śaṃyu		Śaṃyu	Śaṃyu		Śaṃyu	Sudhāman
Bharadvāja	Bharadvāja	Bharadvāja	Bharadvāja		Bharadvāja	
Droṇa	Droṇa	Droṇa	Droṇa	Bhāradvāja	Droṇa	Droṇa
Aśvatthāman	Aśvatthāman	Aśvatthāman	Aśvatthāman	Aśvatthāman	Aśvatthāman	Aśvatthāman
Pallava	Pallava	Pallava	Pallava	Pallava	Skandhaśiṣya	Pallava

* See *IP* 17, 77, 90, 121, 152, 155, and the Vēḷañcēri copper plates. *IP* 54, 62, and a newly found inscription on the Mahendreśvara temple of the Kailāsanātha at Kāñcīpuram (see Francis 2009: 392 n. 370; Francis forthcoming a) are incomplete, but agree with the canonical list in their available portions.

In Table 1, Viṣṇu's name is bracketed because he is not always mentioned and because, when he is, it is generally in the ablative case as the progenitor of Brahmā, who, in agreement with the cosmogonic accounts of the Purāṇas, sprang from his navel. The Pallavas thus place their origin at the beginning of time, when Brahmā created the world.

With the next ancestor, Aṅgiras, we are still partially in this primeval period, since he is one of Brahmā's mind-born sons, who assisted the god in his work

8. See *IP* 17, v. 2; 46, lines 9–11; 54, vv. 2–3; 62, vv. 1–2; 68 (the first eight names of its list of kings); 76, lines 8–11; 77, vv. 10–18; 81, v. 2; 90, v. 3; 121, v. 3; 152, vv. 3–5; 155, vv. 2–6; 257, vv. 2–3ab; 270, vv. 2–8; Vēḷañcēri copper plates, vv. 3–4. The Kumaraḍimaṅgala copper plates (v. 2b) mention some mythical ancestors.
9. The Cāḷukya Rājāditya shares most of the mythical ancestors of the Pallavas in his Hirekōgilūr copper plates (873 *śaka*, i.e. 951/2 CE; *Annual Report of the Mysore Archaeological Department for the Year 1935*: 117–30), where Śaṃyu is omitted and the eponym Pallava replaced by an eponym Caḷuki, who sprang from a handful of water drawn by Aśvatthāman. As pointed out to me by James Hegarty, the Caulukya dynasty has a similar descent from Bhāradvāja (i.e. Droṇa) in the Bilhāri stone inscription of Yuvarājadeva (vv. 30–33; Mirashi 1955: 211).

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of creation and established the sacrifice.[10] Aṅgiras and his descendants are associated by tradition with the *Ṛgveda* and *Atharvaveda* (*Bṛhaddevatā* 7.81ab = 102cd;[11] *Mbh* 5.18.5–8). According to the *Bṛhaddevatā* (5.67–69 = 97–99), Aṅgiras is born from the coal (*aṅgāra*) of the fire of a sacrifice offered by Prajāpati.[12] This association with Agni is developed in the *Mahābhārata* (3.207–209): Agni, the fire, has become ill, and he adopts, as his son, Aṅgiras, who engenders an Āgneya line. Aṅgiras is also known as *purohita* of the Vaiśāla dynasty (Pargiter 1922: 157) or of Indra (*Mbh* 1.158.26).

Pallava records describe Aṅgiras along the lines of the tradition, as a mind-born son of Brahmā (*IP* 54, v. 2; 77, v. 11), as a *muni* (*IP* 54, v. 2; Vēḷañcēri copper plates, v. 3), and as a specialist in *gir*, 'speech' (*IP* 152, v. 3; 270, v. 2)—that is, *śruti*. Only one inscription (*IP* 77, v. 11) provides more details, stating that he is an ascetic and a *ṛṣi*, born from Brahmā on the occasion of a sacrifice, and that he has pre-eminence over Agni.

Bṛhaspati, like his father, is a pure brahmin. He is the well-known *purohita* of the gods, and specifically of their king, Indra (Schmidt 1968). This function, as well as his expertise in speech (*gir*), is mentioned in the Pallava inscriptions (*IP* 17, v. 2; 54, v. 2; 77, v. 12; 90, v. 3; 121, v. 3; 152, v. 3; 155, v. 3; Vēḷañcēri copper plates, v. 2). He is also presented as wise (*IP* 257, v. 2), and as expert in government (*IP* 77, v. 12).[13] As for his being victorious over the demon Bala (*IP* 155, v. 3), a traditional feat of Indra, this might signal a warrior tendency that will become increasingly manifest amongst his descendants.

Śaṃyu is not as well known as his father and grandfather. Tradition—the *Bṛhaddevatā* (5.70 = 102), for instance—usually ignores him and knows Bṛhaspati as the father of Bharadvāja, as only one Pallava inscription does (*IP* 46, line 10).[14] In the *Mahābhārata* (3.209.1–6), however, Śaṃyu is son of Bṛhaspati and father of Bharadvāja in the Āgneya line of Aṅgiras. In other texts, he is taught about *śrāddha* by Bṛhaspati—most of the *Śrāddhakalpa* of the *Vāyu Purāṇa* (71–85) is a dialogue between Bṛhaspati and Śaṃyu (Hazra 1940: 16)—and is also known as a master in the *Yajurveda* tradition (e.g. at *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.9.1.24–26).

According to the Pallavas, Śaṃyu is powerful and celebrated in the three worlds (*IP* 54, v. 2), best among the ascetics (*IP* 90, v. 3), and intelligent (*IP* 121, v. 3). In *IP* 77, v. 13 he is bright like the sun, and performs the task of carrying the offerings to the gods when the fire is in hiding.

10. On the mind-born sons of Brahmā, see Biardeau 1981: 73–74, 160–61, and, for instance, *Liṅga Purāṇa* 1.70.181–82.
11. In my *Bṛhaddevatā* references, the first reference is to Tokunaga's edition, the second to Macdonell's (provided only if different).
12. See also, for variant accounts, *Matsya Purāṇa* 195.8–10; *Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 2.1.40–42; *Liṅga Purāṇa* 1.70.187.
13. Renou (1946: 30) mentions Bṛhaspati among the traditional founders of *arthaśāstra*. There exists also a *Bṛhaspatismṛti*. On the association of Bhāradvājas with political science, see Sarmah 1991: 257–62.
14. See Sarmah 1991: 165; Sarmah tends to consider Śaṃyu and Bharadvāja as brothers.

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Like Aṅgiras and the Āṅgirases, Bharadvāja and his descendants are credited with the composition of Vedic texts, that is, hymns and *sūtra*s (*Bṛhaddevatā* 5.71 = 103; Gonda 1977: 520, 590; Sarmah 1991: xxv). Bharadvāja is one of the great *ṛṣi*s (see e.g. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 3.1.32) and is also, in some accounts, the *purohita* of Divodāsa (Pargiter 1922: 154) or of the sons of Sṛñjaya (*Bṛhaddevatā* 5.88–92 = 124–28). He also appears in other famous texts such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1.2; 2.56, 84–86) and the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* (3.10.11; see Sivaramamurti 1969: 135).[15]

In the *Mahābhārata* (3.209) Bharadvāja is—as he is in most Pallava inscriptions—the son of Śaṃyu and the grandson of Bṛhaspati in the lineage of Aṅgiras. He is depicted as a *ṛṣi*, first recipient of the *dhanurveda*, and expert in *rājadharma* (Brodbeck 2009: 143–46). He weds Vīrā and engenders a son named Vīra (*Mbh* 3.209.9). These names denoting martial valour imply a congenital tendency towards kṣatriyahood.

In other texts, Bharadvāja is son of Bṛhaspati (*Bṛhaddevatā* 5.70 = 102; Pargiter 1922: 157–64; Sarmah 1991: 52–54). When the latter raped his sister-in-law Mamatā, his semen was expelled by the embryo (Dīrghatamas) that was already in Mamatā's womb. Some accounts[16] focus on Dīrghatamas without mentioning Bharadvāja. Others explain that from the semen of Bṛhaspati arose another child: Bharadvāja, who helped Bharata to ensure the continuity of his royal lineage, whether because Bharata adopted him, or because he gave his own son to Bharata, or because he successfully sacrificed for Bharata.[17]

Bharadvāja is thus an ambivalent character. On the one hand he is, like his ancestors, a pure brahmin learned in the Vedas, officiating as *purohita*. On the other hand, he has a particular link with *dhanurveda*, kingship, and kṣatriyahood. The *Vāyu Purāṇa* (99.153) stresses his transformation from brahmin to *kṣatriya*, while the *Matsya Purāṇa* (49.33) states that he engendered lineages of brahmin *kṣatriya*s (see Sarmah 1991: 68). Bharadvāja thus represents the confusion of *svadharma*s, which is common in the Kali age, abhorred by Brahmanical orthodoxy, but assumed by the Pallavas as essential to their public identity.

Even though Pallava inscriptions do not stress the *kṣatriya* side of Bharadvāja—presenting him as an ascetic (*IP* 54, v. 2; 77, v. 14; 152, v. 4; 270, v. 2; Vēḷañcēri copper plates, v. 3) and as a specialist in the *śruti* (*IP* 77, v. 14; 270, v. 2), while *IP* 257, v. 2 links his austerities to the birth of Droṇa—the fact is that from their earliest inscriptions the Pallavas claim to belong to

15. For a complete survey of the mentions of Bharadvāja in literature, see Sarmah 1991, chapters 1–5.
16. Such as *Mbh* 1.98 (which cannot introduce Bharadvāja since he is, in this text, the son of Śaṃyu, 3.209.4), or *Bṛhaddevatā* 4.11–15.
17. See *Mbh* 1.89.18; *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 4.19.3–7; *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 9.20.34–39; *Vāyu Purāṇa* 99.137–50; *Matsya Purāṇa* 49.25–33; *Harivaṃśa* 23.49–53; *Brahma Purāṇa* 13.59–61; *Agni Purāṇa* 278.8–9; Kirfel 1927: 541, v. 36; Sarmah 1991: 60–68 (arguing that the Bharadvāja adopted by Bharata is not the son of Bṛhaspati but a descendant).

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the Bhāradvāja *gotra*. This affiliation may indicate at this early date their affinity with kṣatriyahood, a feature that will become more explicit for the next two members of the mythical genealogy, who are mostly known from the *Mahābhārata*.

Droṇa is the well-known *guru* of the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas.[18] He is born from Bharadvāja's semen, spilled at the sight of the bathing *apsaras* Ghṛtācī and collected in a wooden vessel (*droṇa*). The *Mahābhārata* does not detail the descent of Droṇa from Aṅgiras, but the filiation is clear, since his father Bharadvāja is an Āgneya descendant of Aṅgiras (*Mbh* 3.209). Moreover, Droṇa stands in the spiritual lineage of Bṛhaspati through the transmission of the *āgneyāstra* (*Mbh* 1.121.6–7, 158.26–27, 169.21). He learned the Vedas (*Mbh* 1.121.5, 154.5), but is also an expert in archery (*Mbh* 1.61.64–65). He obtained, as a gift, the weapons of Paraśurāma (*Mbh* 1.121.16–23). Droṇa thus is, more clearly than his father, a brahmin-warrior. As such he is qualified to become the second generalissimo of the Kauravas (*Mbh* 7.5.37).

The account of his quarrel with the *kṣatriya* Drupada may throw light on his shift from a brahmin to a *kṣatriya* way of life. When Droṇa, as a poor *vānaprastha*, went asking riches from his old friend Drupada, who had by that time become king, the latter refused to help him. Droṇa took revenge when, at the end of his teaching to the Pāṇḍavas, he asked Arjuna to conquer half of Drupada's kingdom for him (*Mbh* 1.128). There are conflicting interpretations of this episode where a brahmin and a king are opposed. According to Dumézil (1986: 196–98), Droṇa, incarnation of Bṛhaspati, teaches a lesson to an arrogant Drupada: a brahmin must be treated as equal to a king. Biardeau (1988: 82–87; 1994: 126–31) reverses the roles: Drupada in fact scolds Droṇa, who desires riches by cupidity (*lobha*) and, against his *svadharma*, refuses to obtain them in the service of a king. In order to acquire what Drupada refuses him, Droṇa thus chooses the way of the warrior. So he is a brahmin-warrior not for the reason that Paraśurāma was—that is, in order to chastise the failure of the *kṣatriya*s—but out of greed.

The Pallava inscriptions mention the unusual birth of Droṇa, from a pot (*IP* 77, v. 15; 257, v. 2, where the perspiration of Śaṃyu makes explicit the link between asceticism and the birth of a son; 121, v. 3). In *IP* 270, v. 3 Droṇa, of terrible heroism, is son of Sudhāman, and is an ascetic who pleases Śiva in order to obtain a son destined to be the founder of a lineage. He is the *guru* of the Pāṇḍavas and Kurus (*IP* 54, v. 3), being compared to Druhiṇa (i.e. Brahmā; *IP* 77, v. 15; 152, v. 4). Two inscriptions hail his heroism in combat (*IP* 90, v. 3; 155, v. 4, where he is compared to Indra). The Droṇa of the Pallavas is thus, as in the *Mahābhārata*, a brahmin, officiating as *guru*, and a warrior, who obtains through austerities a son from Śiva (*Mbh* 9.5.15): Aśvatthāman.

18. See *Mbh* 1.121–23 and 1.154, recounting his birth, his union with Kṛpī, his engendering of Aśvatthāman, his appointment as preceptor of the Pauravas, his visit to Paraśurāma, and his quarrel with Drupada. See also Scheuer 1982: 83–84; Brodbeck 2009: 151–59.

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Aśvatthāman, like his father, is mainly known from the *Mahābhārata*[19] and is a brahmin-warrior, expert in weapons (see e.g. *Mbh* 1.57.90, 121.16, 123.41; 5.54.47; 7.162.2). His birth is recounted at *Mbh* 1.121.11–15.[20] Aśvatthāman is born from Mahādeva (i.e. Śiva), Antaka (i.e. Death), desire (*kāma*) and anger (*krodha*, *Mbh* 1.61.66; see also 7.166.17, 172.82; 15.39.15). He describes himself as 'born in an excellent and honourable lineage of brahmins, but dedicated to the *dharma* of the *kṣatriya*s because of misfortune' (*Mbh* 10.3.21). Aśvatthāman is mostly known as the leader of the night expedition against the Pāṇḍava camp that was initiated in order to avenge his father's death. This is told in the *Sauptikaparvan* (*Mbh* 10), where Śiva literally took possession of him (*Mbh* 10.6–7; Kramrisch 1981: 85–88; Scheuer 1982: 307–10). In a final fight with Arjuna, Aśvatthāman directed his *brahmaśiras* weapon towards the embryos in the wombs of the Pāṇḍava women. Kṛṣṇa announced that he would resuscitate Parikṣit, while Aśvatthāman was condemned to wander the earth (Brodbeck 2009: 159–72).

According to Scheuer (1982: 327–40, 349–54), Aśvatthāman, as an incarnation of Śiva, is the destructive aspect of the sacrifice. As a member of Aṅgiras's Āgneya lineage, he is the fire that ends the sacrifice that is the Bhārata war and so allows for the regeneration of the world. The fire he sets in the Pāṇḍava camp is the fire of destruction at the end of a cosmic cycle (*Mbh* 9.64.31). In Scheuer's words (1982: 339), *contra* Hiltebeitel (1972), Aśvatthāman brings about a sacrifice of destruction rather than the destruction of (the?) sacrifice. He is the destructive aspect of the *avatāra*, while Kṛṣṇa is the protective aspect, the one that ensures the continuity of the Pāṇḍava lineage.

In the Pallava records, Aśvatthāman's *tejas* is unlimited (*IP* 46, line 10; 76, line 10). In *IP* 270, v. 4, he is compared to the rising sun. His fiery nature may be connected to his incarnating the fire of destruction, and to his warrior qualities that are stressed elsewhere (*IP* 54, v. 3; 81, v. 2; 90, v. 3; 257, v. 3). Two inscriptions focus on his being a portion (*aṃśa*) of Śiva (*IP* 17, v. 2; 121, v. 3). Others mention both his warrior qualities and his connection with Śiva: in *IP* 152, v. 4 he is a thunderbolt (*aśani*, a name of Śiva) for his enemies; *IP* 270, v. 4 reminds us that his birth is a favour (*prasāda*) of Śambhu (i.e. Śiva; the father's austerities were mentioned in the previous verse); two inscriptions proclaim the strength of his arms and his being a portion of Śiva (*IP* 62, v. 1; 155, v. 4); in *IP* 77, v. 16 he is an *avatāra* of Śiva who frightened Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna and Bhīma. Finally, two inscriptions mention his austerities and their fruit—that is, the birth of Pallava (*IP* 62, v. 1; 77, v. 16). For the Pallavas, Aśvatthāman is thus a powerful and victorious warrior and an incarnation of Śiva, as in the *Mahābhārata*. Both features explain his choice as father for the eponym of a predominantly Śaiva dynasty. However, the Pallava records need to expand on

19. See *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.7 for a variant of his punishment at the end of the Bhārata war. See also *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 3.3.21; *Matsya Purāṇa* 9.32.
20. On Aśvatthāman's filiation, see *Mbh* 1.57.90, 61.66–67; 5.54.47.

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the epic account. While the asceticism of Aśvatthāman reveals his brahmin nature, it also makes the wandering ascetic left at the end of the *Mahābhārata* the father of the eponym Pallava, since austerities often result in birth.

Before we look at the Pallava accounts of the birth of their eponym, let us summarize what we have learned about his ancestors. In the accounts of the literary tradition, we observe a shift from purely brahmin figures (Aṅgiras, Bṛhaspati, Śaṃyu) to brahmin-warriors (Droṇa, Aśvatthāman), with Bharadvāja appearing as a transitional figure between these two types of ancestor. Bharadvāja does not explicitly play this role in the Pallava records, but we clearly see there a shift from the brahmin features of the first ancestors (knowledge of the Vedas, the role of *purohita*) to the warrior features of Droṇa and Aśvatthāman. Notably, the *Mahābhārata* appears to have been the point of reference for the Pallavas, since this is the only tradition that gives importance to Droṇa as well as to Aśvatthāman, and it is, as far as I know, the only tradition where the continuous lineage from Aṅgiras to Aśvatthāman, including Śaṃyu, is traceable. Noteworthy also is the importance of asceticism as a feature of the mythical ancestors. For the earlier ones it denotes their brahmin status, whereas for the later ones (Bharadvāja, Droṇa, Aśvatthāman) it is a mode of generation, since austerities result in the birth of a son.

THE EPONYM PALLAVA

With the eponym Pallava, the shift from brahminhood to kingship is carried out in the brahmin lineage of the Pallavas.

In the oldest account of the birth of the eponym, his father Aśvatthāman is an ascetic, while his mother is not even mentioned. Aśvatthāman is there compared to the Vedas, while the eponym is compared to the Vedāṅgas in respect of his father, and to the moon in respect of the Pallava lineage, which itself is compared to the Gaṅgā:[21]

> *aśvatthāmno 'tha tasmān nicitagurutaponirmmalād āvir āsīd*
> *āmnāyād aṃgavidyāvisara iva mahīvalla[bhaḥ palla*]vākhyaḥ |*
> *yasmād eṣa [u - -*[22]*] pathi vihitapadāt pāvane mānanīyo*
> *mandākinyā[ḥ*] pravāhaḥ śaśina iva mahān anvayaḥ pallavānām ‖ 2 ‖*
> (Paṉaimalai stone inscription, v. 2; Rangacharya 1928: 113; *IP* 62; *c.* 700–725)

21. The quotations of inscriptions are only partially normalized (notably by inserting *avagrahas* and normalizing the erratic use of *daṇḍas* and verse numbers) and emended. Editorial changes are marked by de-italicization of characters. The original forms are given in the notes. The following conventions are adopted: engraved letters that have been damaged but remain to some extent readable stand between square brackets; restored letters, that is, unengraved letters that are supplied, or vowels with unmarked length, stand between square brackets and are marked by an asterisk. Translations are mine.
22. Rangacharya (1928: 113 n. 6) suggests *prabhūtaḥ* or *prajajñe* for the lacuna.

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> Then, from that Aśvatthāman who was purified by a continuous and severe penance, arose the beloved of the earth named Pallava, like the multitude of the subsidiary knowledges (*aṅga*, i.e. the six Vedāṅgas) from the sacred tradition (i.e. the Vedas). From him, who laid down his feet in a purifying path (i.e. asceticism), [arose] the great and honourable lineage of the Pallavas, like the stream of the Mandākinī (i.e. the Gaṅgā) from the moon.

In a slightly later account, Aśvatthāman, who is described as an ascetic in the previous verse (*IP* 77, v. 16), gives birth to the eponym following the arrival of an *apsaras* named Menakā. Indra sent her because he was afraid of losing his own kingly position:

> *jātas tataḥ svapadaśaṃkitamānasena śakreṇa tam prati visarjjitamenakāyām* ।
> *āpallavair anabhimṛṣṭasamudranemiḥ śrīpallavas sapadi palla[va*]saṃstareṣu* ॥ 17 ॥
> (Kacākūṭi copper plates, v. 17; Hultzsch 1895: 347; *IP* 77; *c.* 750)

> From him (*tataḥ*, i.e. Aśvatthāman; or: then), by Menakā—whom Śakra (i.e. Indra), afraid in his mind for his own position, had sent to him—was at once born, on a couch of sprouts (*pallava*), the glorious Pallava, thanks to whom the earth was untouched by any fragments of calamity (*āpallavair*, i.e. *āpadāṃ lavaiḥ*).

A third account is found in a stone inscription dated on palaeographical grounds to *c.* 1100. This inscription may be an apocrypha or a copy of an earlier record, but whatever its status it is indispensable, as it furnishes the most detailed account of the eponym's birth. This account closely accords with the previous ones: here the temptress is Madanī, daughter of Indra. She is attracted by ascetics (*āraṇyanivāsin*), and once she sees Aśvatthāman she cannot resist him. One gathers that kingship, in the person of the daughter of Indra, finds in Aśvatthāman the lineage in which she can fulfil herself.

> *tapasyatas tasya kilāpsarovṛtā sureṃdrakanyā madanīti viśrutā* ।
> *kadācid āraṇyanivāsimandiraṃ didṛkṣur ālokapathaṃ jagāma sā* ॥ 5 ॥
> *saraḥpravātāṃbujaviṣkhala[t*]priyāviyogabhītaṃ kalahaṃsamaṇḍalaṃ* ।
> *aśokabhūmāv upaviśya saspṛhaṃ vilokayantīm upatasthivān ṛṣiḥ* ॥ 6 ॥
> *umeva śarvvaṃ prababhūva nātmano nirīkṣya taṃ kāmam iva ṛṣiveṣiṇam* ।
> *athobhayaṃ gāḍhanibaddhabhāvakaṃ surāṃganās saṃgamayāṃ babhūvire* ॥ 7 ॥
> *asūta kāle surarājakanyā nāthaṃ bhuvas sāgaramekhalāyāḥ* ।
> *sapallavaughāstaraṇe śayānaṃ pitā sutaṃ pallava ity avādīt* ॥ 8 ॥
> (Amarāvatī pillar inscription, vv. 5–8; Hultzsch 1890: 26; *IP* 270)[23]

> It is said that once, the daughter of the king of the gods, named (or: celebrated as) Madanī, surrounded by *apsaras*es and desirous of seeing the abode of the forest dwellers, entered the path of his sight while he was practising austerities.
>
> The sage approached her as, seated under an *aśoka* tree, she was longingly staring at groups of male swans that were terrified of being separated from their beloved ones who were stumbling in the lotuses agitated by the wind in the ponds.

23. The original text has *ṛṣiṃ...nirīkṣi...ṛṣiveṣiṇaṃ...sāgaramekhalāyāṃ...sapallavoghāstaraṇe...avādīḥ*.

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> Like Umā seeing Śarva, she lost control of herself on seeing him—he who was just like Kāma in the guise of a sage. The *apsaras*es then united them one to another, both deeply bound by affection.
>
> In due course the daughter of the king of the gods gave birth to a lord of the ocean-girdled earth. The father called his son Pallava, as he was lying on a couch [made] of many sprouts (*pallava*).

In these three accounts, Aśvatthāman is described as an ascetic. In two of them, his austerities are interrupted by a temptress, and an etymological explanation of the dynasty's name is given (the cradle of the eponym is a litter of *pallava*s). There is a variant to this canonical myth of the birth of the eponym Pallava in an inscription issued by Skandhaśiṣya (i.e. Skandaśiṣya), who belonged most probably to a collateral line of the Pallavas:

> *aśvatt*[*h**]*āmāsya tantur bhavati khalu purā vikramanya*[*k**]*kṛtāri*[*r**]
> *jāto jihvāṃgaputr*[*y**]*ā*[*ṃ**] bhṛtiyatajagatāṃ *skandhaśiṣyādhirāj*aḥ |
> (Rāyakōṭa copper plates, v. 3ab; Hultzsch 1899: 51; *IP* 257; *c.* 700–800)[24]
>
> His (i.e. Droṇa's) progeny, as is well known, is Aśvatthāman, who in the past humbled his enemies by his heroism; [from him] was born, [begotten] in the daughter of a snake (*jihvāṅga*, i.e. 'he whose body is like a tongue'), Skand(h)aśiṣya, the emperor of the worlds (or: of the beings) that are dependent on his support.[25]

The text is unfortunately corrupt, but it is clear that Aśvatthāman is not described as an ascetic, that there is no *tapas interruptus*, no *apsaras* nor daughter of Indra. One probably has to understand that a *nāgī* gave Aśvatthāman a son named Skand(h)aśiṣya. This first king in the lineage is evidently named as such in reference to his homonymous descendant Skand(h)aśiṣya, who is the donor mentioned in the record.

Another inscription helps to clarify the purport of the alliance between the brahmin Pallava lineage and the snake lineage. There, a king of the pseudo-historical genealogy, also named Skandaśiṣya, is the son of Vīrakūrca and a *nāgī*:

24. The original text has *aśvarttāmāsya...tarntur...vikramānyakratāri...yāto dvijihvāṃginiputrāhvahṛtiyatajagatāṃ skandhaśiṣyādhirājā*. The text I propose is based on the emendations put forward by Hultzsch (1899: 51), who notably proposed *dvijihvāṃganā* for *dvijihvāṃgini*, with the meaning of *nāgakanyā*. Dominic Goodall has further suggested to me (personal communication, October 2008) the following emendations: *dvijihvāṃga* for *dvijihvāṃgini*; *putryāṃ* for *putrā*; in *°putrāhvahṛtiyatajagatāṃ*, deletion of *hva*, probably a mistake that the scribe immediately corrected, but without crossing out the faulty *akṣara*; *bhṛtiyata* for *hṛtiyata*, or even reading *bhṛtiyata*, since the *akṣara*s 'bh' and 'h' are close in form. The *pāda* of this *sragdharā* is thus meaningful, but still has one syllable too many. Arlo Griffiths (personal communication, September 2010) therefore suggested to me to delete the *dvi*, as *jihvāṅga*, although unattested, could designate a snake just as well as *dvijihvāṅga* ('having a *double* tongue') does.
25. Alternatively, as pointed out to me by Whitney Cox (personal communication, September 2010), one might understand the second *pāda* to refer only to Aśvatthāman. Leaving aside the problematic syllables that follow *yāto* and not correcting this word into *jāto*, it would mean: 'who had gone (*yāta*) to the state of... (compound ending in *-tā*) and was an emperor (i.e. the best) among the pupils of Skanda'.

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tatsutād ajani cūtapallavād vīrakūrcca iti viśrutāhvayaḥ |
yaḥ phaṇīndrasutayā sahāgrahīd rājacihnam akhilaṃ yaśodhanaḥ ‖ 6 ‖
anvavāyanabhaścandra[ḥ] skandaśiṣyas tato 'bhavat |*
[d]vijānāṃ ghaṭikāṃ rājñas satyasenāt jahāra yaḥ ‖ 7 ‖*
(Vēlūrpāḷaiyam copper plates, vv. 6–7; Sastri 1916: 508; *IP* 121; *c.* 825–50)

From his son Cūtapallava was born the one celebrated under the name Vīrakūrca, rich in fame, who seized, along with the daughter of the king of the snakes, all the royal insignia.

Then (*tataḥ*; or: from him) arose Skandaśiṣya, the moon in the sky that was his lineage, who seized the *ghaṭikā*[26] of the twice-born from King Satyasena.

The important point here is that the *nāgī* is a princess, and that by uniting with her Vīrakūrca acquired the complete insignia of royalty.

We have thus two different types of Pallava dynastic myth, both of which explain the infusion of kingship into the brahmin lineage of the Pallavas.

In the first type—the myth of the ascetic and the temptress, which is the canonical one—the eponym is Aśvatthāman's son by an *apsaras* sent by Indra (Menakā), or his son by the daughter of Indra (Madanī). Both *apsaras* and princess interrupt Aśvatthāman's austerities and impersonate kingship, the former indirectly, as Indra sent her, and the latter directly, as she is Indra's daughter, irrepressibly attracted by the ascetic Aśvatthāman. As such, the temptress stands as the source of the transmission of Indra's royal power into the Pallava lineage, since her appearance results in the birth of the eponym who will establish a glorious royal dynasty.

The second type is the myth of the *nāgī*. This is the account of the births of Skand(h)aśiṣya (from a *nāgī* and Aśvatthāman) and Skandaśiṣya (from a *nāgī* and Vīrakūrca). The accession of the Pallavas to kingship is here induced through a fruitful matrimonial alliance with the *nāga*s, who, being inhabitants of the ground and waters, represent kingship as autochthonous possessors of the soil.[27]

Both types of myth are depicted in panels on the verandah of the Vaikuṇṭhaperumāḷ temple in Kāñcīpuram in the second half of the eighth century. After the eight mythical ancestors, a panel shows the *tapasvin* Aśvatthāman, the temptress, the eponym on his litter of sprouts, and perhaps Indra on the upper left side (Figure 1). Further on in the series, a fight between a Pallava, probably Vīrakūrca, and a *nāga* (Figure 2) is followed, on the next panel, by the marriage between the Pallava and the daughter of the *nāga* (Figure 3; on these panels, see Minakshi 1941: 5–6, 15–17).

26. A *ghaṭikā* is an institution of brahmins, apparently mainly a school of Vedic learning. See Scharfe 2002: 169–72. For Tieken and Sato (2000) *ghaṭikā*s were primarily connected to the regulation of trade, and were only secondarily religious and educational institutions.
27. On the association of *nāga*s with kingship, see Vogel 1926: 34–36; Toffin 1993: 73–92. On variants of these myths in other areas, see Francis 2009: 193–94; Francis forthcoming b.

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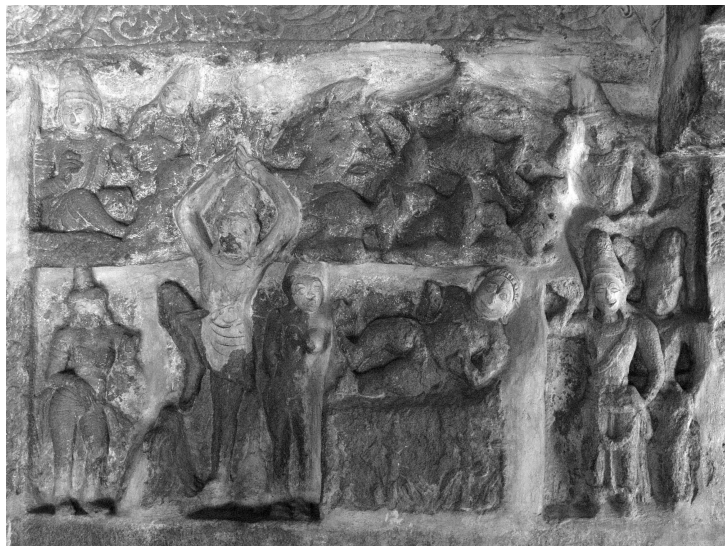

Figure 1. Birth of the eponym Pallava.
Verandah of the Vaikuṇṭhaperumāḷ temple in Kāñcīpuram, wall no. 2, upper row, panel 1, *c.* 750–800. Photograph by the author.

Figure 2. Fight of a Pallava king (left, with a bow) against a *nāga* (right, with a sword).
Verandah of the Vaikuṇṭhaperumāḷ temple in Kāñcīpuram, wall no. 4, upper row, panel 16, *c.* 750–800. Photograph by the author.

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Figure 3. Marriage of a *nāgī* (extreme left, under umbrella) with a Pallava king (left) in the presence of the *nāga* father (right).
Verandah of the Vaikuṇṭhaperumāḷ temple in Kāñcīpuram, wall no. 4, upper row, panel 17, *c.* 750–800. Photograph by the author.

If we now examine the descriptions of the eponym in the Pallava records, we see that his main feature, as one might imagine, is his being the first king of his lineage, in contradistinction to his ancestors who are never described as such. Pallava is the husband or the beloved of the earth (*IP* 17, v. 2; 81, v. 2; 121, v. 3). He is the 'first of the heroic kings who enjoyed the whole earth, like Manu (i.e. the first mythical king), and the founder of a line of victorious [kings]' (*IP* 54, v. 3: *sakalavasumatībhoginām pārtthivānāṃ śūrāṇām ādibhūto manur iva jayinām anvavāyasya karttā*). The Vēḷañcēri copper plates say that 'a family of kings arose then from Pallava, all of whose successes (or: riches) were similar to those of the king of the gods (i.e. Indra), and who was the unique favourite of royal Fortune' (v. 4: *nṛpakulan tato 'bhavat devarājasamasarvvasampadaḥ pallavāt nṛparamaikavallabhāt*)—something close to precisely what Indra feared but failed to prevent, according to *IP* 77, v. 17.

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The eponym Pallava is thus the first king in a brahmin lineage. His dual status, brahmin and *kṣatriya*, is emphasized in the inscription where he is the son of Aśvatthāman and Menakā (*IP* 77, v. 17), which describes him as follows:

> *tejaḥ param brāhmam anūtthito 'pi*[28] *sa kṣātram uccair abhajat svabhāvi* |
> *ambhodharād apy upa[la*]bdhajanmā dāhātmako nanv aśaniḥ prakṛtyā* ‖ 18 ‖
> (Kacākūṭi copper plates, v. 18; Hultzsch 1895: 347; *IP* 77; *c.* 750)[29]
>
> Though born from a brahmin,[30] he innately possessed in abundance the extreme energy of the *kṣatriyas*.[31] Though obtaining birth from a cloud, has not the thunderbolt by nature the essence of fire?

This is an example of the trope named *dṛṣṭānta*, a comparison that explains a paradox. As noticed by Brocquet (1997: 202–203), the paradoxical situation is aptly and nicely compared with a natural phenomenon, which is also apparently of a contradictory nature, but whose reality no one would contest: the fact that fiery thunderbolts originate in clouds that are made of water. Beyond the paradox that a brahmin could be king, something the *śāstra*s forbid, one appreciates that the eponym is a great king and the founder of a lineage of powerful universal rulers precisely because he unites in himself *brahman* (authority) and *kṣatra* (power). In contradistinction to his father and grandfather, Droṇa and Aśvatthāman—pure brahmins by extraction, who adopted the *dharma* of the *kṣatriya* (cases of what I call *dharmasaṅkara*)—the eponym is the outcome of a mixing of *varṇa*s (*varṇasaṅkara*), since his father is a brahmin and his mother impersonates kṣatriyahood. Let us now look briefly at the pseudo-historical genealogies.

PSEUDO-HISTORICAL GENEALOGIES

Nine Pallava inscriptions (between 550 and 900) insert a pseudo-historical genealogy between the eponym and the first king of the historical genealogy.[32] In contradistinction to the mythical ancestors, there is no canonical

28. Hultzsch (1895: 347) reads *brāhmamanūrtthitopi* and suggests emending it to *brāhmakulotthitopi*. I read on the facsimile *brāhmamanūtthitopi*.
29. The original text has *uccer*.
30. That is, *brāhmamanūtthitopi*, which can be understood as *brāhma* + *manu* + *utthito 'pi* ('though born from a brahmin man', with *manu* in the sense of 'man') or better, as suggested to me by Arlo Griffiths (personal communication, September 2010), as *brāhmam anu utthito 'pi* ('though born from a brahmin', with *brāhma* in the sense of *brāhmaṇa*).
31. As suggested to me by Whitney Cox (personal communication, September 2010), another possible translation is: 'Though striving (*utthita*) after (*anu*) the supreme glory (*tejas*) that belongs to the brahmins, he greatly partook of the glory (again *tejas*) that was natural to him—that of the *kṣatriyas*.'
32. See *IP* 17, v. 3; 68, which is a long list of kings concluding with two verses in praise of the last of them; 77, v. 19 and lines 34–51; 90, v. 6; 121, vv. 5–9; 152, vv. 6–7; 155, vv. 7–8; Vēḷañcēri copper plates, v. 6; Kumaraḍimaṅgala copper plates, v. 2.

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list of pseudo-historical figures, although some of them are found in several pseudo-historical genealogies. Moreover, the precise genealogical connection between them is usually not mentioned. Besides kings attested elsewhere in the earlier historical genealogies of the Pallava monolingual Sanskrit charters, some names occur only in these pseudo-historical genealogies, notably those referring to celebrated kings or dynasties whose kingly aura the Pallavas try to appropriate.

We find, for instance, Aśoka or, more often, Aśokavarman in six of the nine pseudo-historical genealogies.[33] I identify him with the Maurya king,[34] whom Buddhist legend magnified as a *cakravartin*. The inclusion of Aśoka does not necessarily mean that the Pallavas were Buddhists in their early period. The Maurya king is appropriated by the Pallavas, I suggest, not as a Buddhist figure, but mainly as a political model.

We also meet Harigupta twice, both times just after Aśoka (*IP* 68; 152, v. 6). This name seems to refer to the Gupta dynasty, another political reference from North India. However, no Harigupta is, as far as I know, mentioned in Gupta records. This name was probably made up to reflect the fact that the Guptas were predominantly Vaiṣṇavas.

Finally, a Koṅkaṇi or Koṃkaṇika appears in two pseudo-historical genealogies (*IP* 68, line 1; 155, v. 7). A king named Koṅkaṇivarman is known elsewhere as the father of the Western Gaṅga king Mādhavavarman I from Karnataka (see Ramesh 1984, inscriptions 1–3; Ali 1976: 40–43). The name Koṅgaṇivarman/Koṅguṇivarman is later a title of the Gaṅga kings,[35] and Koṃkaṇi becomes a kind of mythical founder of that dynasty (see for instance Hultzsch 1895: 383, v. 13). Besides a political dimension as in the cases of Aśoka and Harigupta, a symbolic purport may explain the appropriation of this Gaṅga king by the Pallava lineage, since the myth of the descent of Gaṅgā to earth is central to Pallava royal discourse: Gaṅgā's fall to earth is sculpted in Mahābalipuram, images of Śiva Gaṅgādhara are very popular in Pallava temples, and in the inscriptions the Pallava dynasty is compared several times to the Gaṅgā falling to earth.[36]

The inclusion, in the Pallava pedigree after the eponym, of political figures from other dynasties such as those mentioned above, helps to consolidate the kingly status of this brahmin lineage in its effort to imagine itself to be royal.

33. Aśoka (*IP* 68, line 1, and probably 17, v. 3, which has lacunae), Aśokavarman (*IP* 77, v. 19; 121, v. 5; 152, v. 6), Aśogavarman (Vēḷañcēri copper plates, v. 6). In the latter two cases, *-varman* seems to be a suffix indicating the *kṣatriya varṇa*, *contra* Schalk (2002: 291–94), who argues that the name means 'he who is protected by the *aśoka* tree'.
34. Veluthat (1993: 32 and n. 18) is cautious about this identification, but points out, as did Sircar (1939: 140), that Aśoka is reckoned as an ancestor of the kings of Kashmir in the *Rājatarańgiṇī* of Kalhaṇa (1.102–106).
35. See Rice 1909: 50, and, for instance, Ramesh 1984, inscription 138 (884 *śaka*, i.e. 962/63 CE).
36. See for instance *IP* 62, v. 2 (see above, pp. 347–48). On the importance of the Gaṅgā for the Pallavas, see Francis 2009: 359–71, 416; Francis forthcoming b.

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THE MYTHICAL PATRIMONY OF THE PALLAVAS

Having examined these mythical and pseudo-historical Pallava genealogies, I can now present a synthesis concerning their mythical patrimony. I consider it to be a recreation of the past in order to suit royal ideology, particularly with respect to the Brahmanical conceptualization of kingship. In the face of the Brahmanical discourse that sets it as a norm that kings must belong to the *kṣatriya varṇa*, kings have two options.

The first option is to acknowledge the Brahmanical point of view that distributes authority (*brahman*) and power (*kṣatra*) between the brahmin and the king. In this option dynasties claim—fictitiously or not—*kṣatriya* descent, and link themselves to the lunar or solar *kṣatriya* races of the Purāṇas.

The alternative is to claim brahmin descent. In this case the dynasty unites in itself *brahman* as well as *kṣatra*, and pretends to superiority over plain *kṣatriya* dynasties. One can consider what Heesterman (1998) called the conundrum of kingship—the fact that kingship is subordinated to brahmin authority, or, in the words of Dumont (1966: 103–108), the fact that religion encompasses politics—to be solved in this manner. The necessary union of *brahman* and *kṣatra* is not realized through cooperation between king and chaplain, but is embodied in the person of the king. Viewed from a polemical perspective, one might argue that kingship seeks in this way to emancipate itself from brahmin authority: these kings are not *kṣatriya*s subordinated to brahmin authority, since authority, along with power, already resides in them.

This latter option is taken by the Pallavas—whether they were truly originally brahmins, or merely claimed to be so. The Pallavas may not be the first dynasty to choose this option. We know of earlier dynasties that present themselves as brahmins, but with the Pallavas we have at our disposal clearer and more explicit sources.

In this second option there is, however, a partial acknowledgment of the Brahmanical model of kingship. Firstly, *varṇa* hierarchy is apparently not contested. The brahmin remains socially higher than the *kṣatriya*. But in the case of brahmin kings we have a kind of super-*varṇa*, brahmin and *kṣatriya* combined, at the apex of society.[37] Secondly, brahmin kings carry out the usual business of kings—protecting their kingdoms and patronizing brahmins, for instance.[38] Thirdly, the Brahmanical norm itself acknowledges exceptions to

37. For a comparable conception of kingship as a transfunctional and transcendent category which supersedes all *varṇa*s and incorporates, besides the second Dumézilian function, a fourth encompassing function (in its 'valued' aspect, in contradistinction to its 'devalued' aspect), see Allen 1999 on Arjuna.

38. But we must not forget that, according to anthropological theory, donees—that is, in the case of *brahmadeya*s, brahmins—are inferior compared to donors: donees are clients of the donors and remain obliged to their benefactors. See the seminal work by Mauss published in 1924 (especially pp. 240–50 on 'Droit hindou classique' in the 2001 reprint).

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the strict rules it sets.[39] For instance, a brahmin may live like a warrior if he is not able to survive by his normal activities (Rocher 1975: 147; Bowles 2007: 39, 44). This infringement against orthodox *dharma* is permitted in cases of crisis (*āpad*), and is indeed an index to critical periods for *dharma*. For instance, the Bhārgava brahmin Paraśurāma has to raise his weapons against the *kṣatriya*s when they cease to follow their *rājadharma* and thus threaten the earth.

I would thus consider there to be two types of brahmin-warriors: on the one hand, those who symbolize disorder as well as the danger that threatens *dharma*—such as, for instance, Viśvāmitra, the *kṣatriya* who wants to become a brahmin[40]—and, on the other hand, those who help to regenerate *dharma*—such as Paraśurāma.[41] The Pallavas pretend to be of the second type, since Aśvatthāman, the father of the eponym, though moved by revenge, is an instrument in the hands of the divinity, and plays a destructive but necessary and regenerative role in the *Mahābhārata*.[42]

Although Pallava ideology acknowledges some of the Brahmanical conceptions, it also transforms them. In epic and Purāṇic myths, brahmins adopt the way of warriors only temporarily. When order is restored, they return to the occupation that suits their brahmin identity: Paraśurāma lays down the weapons that Droṇa will come to ask of him, and Aśvatthāman becomes a wandering ascetic. In the *smṛti*s, infringement of *svadharma* is momentary, especially where brahmins are concerned (Rocher 1975: 147). In their *praśasti*s the Pallavas present themselves as destroyers of the evil of the Kali age and restorers of the Kṛta age (see e.g. *IP* 54, v. 4; 77, lines 39–40 and 47). *Dharma* is restored, but this fact does not mean that the Pallavas then enjoy retirement. The temporary exception of the Brahmanical ideology becomes a permanent norm in the royal ideology.

To summarize momentarily: this royal conception of kingship was established and made explicit progressively in the royal discourse of the Pallavas. Between 300 and 550, the only hint of the brahmin status of the Pallavas is the recurrent mention that they belong to the Bhāradvāja *gotra*. More explicit statements appear with the Purāṇa-style genealogy around 550. The

39. For a general introduction to *āpaddharma* ('right conduct in times of distress') and a detailed discussion of its treatment in the *Āpaddharmaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, i.e. the second subsection of the *Śāntiparvan* (book 12), see Bowles 2007.
40. On Viśvāmitra, see recently Sathaye (2007), who does not consider this figure along the same lines as me, but interestingly concludes that 'the *Mahābhārata* permitted the expression of counter-normative voices and possibilities, but which were carefully and safely couched within a naturalized, Brahman-centered social order' (p. 62), something the Pallava genealogies precisely do.
41. On Paraśurāma and the Bhārgavas, another 'family' of brahmins who assume 'one of the central functions of the kṣatriyas, the mastery of the arts of war', see Goldman 1977: 99. See especially pp. 103–104 on the discrepancies between the figures of Paraśurāma and Viśvāmitra.
42. On 'the association and even the possible confusion between the Bhārgavas and the Āṅgirasas', of whom the Bhāradvājas constitute a sub-branch, see Goldman 1977: 147.

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first ancestors, such as Aṅgiras, Bṛhaspati, Śaṃyu and Bharadvāja, are pure brahmins in the Pallava sources. The choice of this lineage is revealing. These brahmins are specialists of the Vedas and sometimes officiate as *purohita*s. Who could be better kings than descendants of those who were specialists in the ultimate source of *dharma* and the political councillors of kings? The warrior or kingly orientation of the lineage becomes clearer with Droṇa and Aśvatthāman, the famous brahmin-warriors of the *Mahābhārata*, mainly described as warriors in Pallava inscriptions. However, neither of these ancestors are products of a mixing of *varṇa*s (*varṇasaṅkara*), but rather illustrate the confusion of *dharma*s (*dharmasaṅkara*), since they are still pure brahmins, even though they behave like *kṣatriya*s.

Mixing of *varṇa*s (*varṇasaṅkara*) occurs in the eponym Pallava, whose mother-temptress, causing the ascetic Aśvatthāman to spill his semen, is either a nymph sent by Indra (Menakā) or the daughter of Indra (Madanī). The mother of the eponym thus stands for a *kṣatriya* lineage that unites with a brahmin lineage. When Aśvatthāman is not an ascetic, and engenders not the eponym Pallava but a king named Skand(h)aśiṣya, the maternal lineage has no link with Indra but rather with the *nāga*s, who are kingly figures insofar as they are inhabitants of the soil. Whatever the origin of the royal blood in the Pallava lineage (through an *apsaras* or through a *nāgī*), it comes from the maternal side, and it is infused into the paternal brahmin lineage in a type of *anuloma* union (hypergamous union, wherein the man is of higher status than the woman) which, although an instance of *varṇasaṅkara*, is tolerated—or comparatively un-deprecated—by the *śāstra*s.

The pseudo-historical genealogies and collective descriptions of the Pallavas that follow the mythical genealogy also account for this transformation of a brahmin lineage into a royal one by stressing the military and political valour of the descendants of the eponym, notably by including in his lineage prestigious royal figures borrowed from other dynasties.

The royal discourse of the Pallavas thus uses a Brahmanical conceptual frame, but subverts it to suit its royal ideology. The Pallavas are kings of the Kali age, an age when, in order to restore *dharma*, *brahman* has to turn into *kṣatra* or merge with *kṣatra*, as in the cases of Paraśurāma and Aśvatthāman. But brahmin-warriorhood is turned from temporary exception to permanent norm, and becomes a royal model. This can be understood as a royal response to the secularization of kingship that Dumont (1966: 356–57) identified in Brahmanical discourse: the Pallavas acknowledge the śāstric distinction between *brahman* and *kṣatra*, but locate their union—necessary for the welfare of the earth—not in the cooperation of a king with his superordinate brahmin *purohita*, but in the dynasty itself as it embodies both *brahman* and *kṣatra*. With this self-presentation, kingship aimed to recover or retain the magico-religious functions that Brahmanical ideology tried to monopolize for brahmins.

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Beyond the choice of being a deviant brahmin lineage, one could ask why the Pallavas precisely linked themselves to a lineage that sided with the Kauravas against the Pāṇḍavas in the Bhārata war.

A first incentive for this association of the Pallavas with the Kauravas—whom I would not call the 'villains' of the *Mahābhārata*, since their action is part of a divine plan—could be the fact that the Pallavas, from the moment they were based in the Tamil country from 550 onwards, were rivals of the Pāṇḍyas, who were associated with the Pāṇḍavas (Venkayya 1909: 220 n. 6).

Another reason may be the importance of Skanda, the young warrior god, for kingship in general and especially for Pallava royal ideology. It is striking that the birth of the eponym Pallava echoes some versions of the story of Skanda, where Skanda is the son of Śiva and Pārvatī (on Skanda's birth, see L'Hernault 1978: 10–16). In these versions Śiva is an ascetic; Pārvatī—herself the daughter of King Dakṣa—can be considered a temptress who provokes the spilling of Śiva's semen; and Agni—father of Skanda in other versions of his birth—carries the god's semen to the banks of the Gaṅgā, where the wives of the *ṛṣi*s nurture the young Skanda among reeds (*śara*), hence his names Śarajanman and Śaravaṇodbhava. Moreover, the gods fear the birth of such a powerful god and Indra tries to kill him (*Mbh* 3.215–16), a story depicted in the Kailāsanātha temple in Kāñcīpuram, as shown by Gillet (2010: 289–96 and figs 205–209; see Figure 4).

Besides the obvious parallelism between Skanda's birth and that of the eponym Pallava as described above, it is also remarkable that Aṅgiras is the originator of an Āgneya line—as described in the *Mahābhārata* (3.207–209) as a prelude to the birth of Skanda (3.213–16)—and that Agni is either the father of Skanda or plays an important role in the versions where Śiva is the father.

Other facts point to the importance of Skanda for the Pallavas. In a series of *śleṣa*s in one Pallava inscription, unnamed Pallava kings who came after the eponym are compared, as a group, to Skanda (*IP* 77, lines 38–39). Diagrammatic comparisons where a king is compared to Śiva, while his son is compared to Skanda, are known in Pallava records (Brocquet 1997: 136–39). Somāskandamūrtis (i.e. representations of Śiva seated with Umā holding Skanda on her lap) are depicted on the back wall of the *garbagṛha* of most of the royal Pallava temples. The Gaṅgā, on the banks of which Skanda is raised, supplied a central royal allegory for the Pallava dynasty. The reeds among which Skanda is grown further recall the litter of sprouts from which the eponym Pallava derives his name.

This dichotomy of Śiva and Skanda reflects the twofold nature of the Pallava dynasty. The ascetic Śiva, father of Skanda, reflects its brahmin side, while the young warrior Skanda reflects its *kṣatriya* side (see Francis 2009: 230–33, 430–33). As for Pārvatī, to whom queens are also compared in diagrammatic comparisons where kings are compared to Śiva, she may, as a king's daughter,

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incarnate kingship in Pallava art. She is indeed often represented under the umbrella, a royal symbol, that adorns only her in Pallava Somāskandamūrtis. It is difficult to determine whether the figure of Skanda—as warrior-god heir of Śiva, and as analogue of the heir-prince who allows his father-king to quit the world and turn towards the ultra-mundane once the continuity of rule is ensured—explains the association of the Pallavas with the Āṅgirases, or was secondarily derived from it. In any case, the Śiva/Skanda dichotomy illustrates the dual character of the dynasty in a way that complements their claim to be of brahmin and *kṣatriya* descent.

Figure 4. Fight between Indra (left) and Skanda (upper right), with Brahmā in the middle. *Prākāra* of the Kailāsanātha temple in Kāñcīpuram, southern wall, panel on the northern face of chapel no. 11, *c.* 700–725. Photograph by the author.

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ABBREVIATIONS

IP *Inscriptions of the Pallavas* (Mahalingam 1988), followed by inscription number
Mbh *Mahābhārata*

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